



Department of State

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TO USINT HAVANA NIACR IMMEDIATE

ALL AMERICAN REPUBLIC DIPLOMATIC POSTS

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ALL AMERICAN REPUBLICS HANDLE AS IMMEDIATE ACTION

E.O. 12065: N/A

TAGS: PINR, SOPN, CU, UR

SUBJECT: SOVIET GROUND UNIT IN CUBA.

1. THE FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM UNOFFICIAL, UNCORRECTED
TRANSCRIPT OF THE AUGUST 31, 1979 STATE DEPARTMENT BRIEFING.
THE SPOKESMAN WAS HODDING CARTER. IF NECESSARY CORRECTED
VERSION WILL FOLLOW.2. BEGIN TEXT: CARTER: WE HAVE RECENTLY CONFIRMED THE
PRESENCE IN CUBA OF WHAT APPEARS TO BE A SOVIET COMBAT
UNIT. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CONFIRM
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THE PRESENCE OF A SOVIET GROUND FORCES UNIT ON THE ISLAND.

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ELEMENTS OF THE UNIT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN THERE SINCE AT LEAST 1976. WE ESTIMATE THAT IT CONSISTS OF SOME 2,000 TO 3,000 MEN. THE UNIT INCLUDES ARMORED, ARTILLERY AND INFANTRY ELEMENTS. IN ADDITION, WE ESTIMATE THAT THE SOVIETS MAINTAIN BETWEEN 1,500 AND 2,000 MILITARY ADVISORY AND TECHNICAL PERSONNEL IN CUBA.

AS CURRENT CONFIGURED AND SUPPORTED, THE UNIT POSES NO THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES.

GROUND FORCES PER SE DID NOT FIGURE IN OUR BILATERAL UNDERSTANDING WITH THE SOVIETS WHICH WERE DIRECTED TOWARD OFFENSIVE WEAPONS SYSTEMS.

NONETHELESS, WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE PRESENCE OF SOVIET COMBAT TROOPS IN CUBA.

WE HAVE IN RECENT MONTHS RAISED WITH THE SOVIETS THE ISSUE OF THE SOVIET/CUBAN MILITARY RELATIONSHIP. ON AUGUST 29TH WE CALLED IN THE SOVIET CHARGE TO EXPRESS OUR CONCERNS ABOUT THIS SOVIET GROUND FORCE UNIT. WE WILL CONTINUE OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THEM ON THIS SUBJECT.

WE WILL, OF COURSE, CONTINUE TO MONITOR ALL ASPECTS OF SOVIET MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN CUBA TO ENSURE THERE IS NO THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES. (END OF STATEMENT)

Q. HODDING, WHY ARE YOU CONCERNED?

A. OUR CONCERN IS CENTERED ON THE FACT THAT THESE ARE, IN FACT, COMBAT TROOPS AND IT IS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND
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THE RATIONALE FOR THEIR PRESENCE.

Q. WELL, DO YOU THINK THEY ARE THERE AS A STAGING AREA FOR SOMETHING ELSE?

A. I HAVE NO WAY TO DETERMINE AT THIS POINT THE BRIGADE'S MISSION, THIS UNIT'S. THIS IS AMONG THE THINGS WE ARE SEEKING TO DETERMINE.

Q. WHEN YOU CALLED ON THE SOVIET CHARGE TWO DAYS AGO,

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WHAT DID HE SAY ABOUT IT AND WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE RATIONALE BEHIND DOING THAT AT THIS TIME?

A. I CAN'T GO INTO OUR DIPLOMATIC EXCHANGES. LET ME JUST GO ON TO REITERATE THAT WE WILL CONTINUE OUR DISCUSSIONS ON THIS I EXPECT MORE. I WOULD NOT LOOK TO A GREAT DEAL FROM THAT FIRST DISCUSSION. BUT WE ARE CONTINUING THEM.

Q. HODGING, IN THAT DISCUSSION WITH THE SOVIET CHARGE, CAN YOU TELL US DID WE GO BEYOND ASKING FOR AN EXPLANATION (A) DID WE RECEIVE ONE, AND (B) BEYOND THAT DID WE ASK FOR THE REMOVAL OF ANY OR PART OF THIS COMBAT UNIT?

A. I AM REALLY NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO GO ANY FURTHER INTO THE SUBJECT OF THE CONVERSATION OR THE RESPONSE EXCEPT TO SAY THAT WE INTEND TO CONTINUE PURSUING THE MATTER.

I REALLY WANT TO MAKE CLEAR SOMETHING HERE BECAUSE IT IS IMPORTANT.

WE ARE NOT NOW IN A POSITION TO CHARACTERIZE THE UNIT'S PRESENCE ON THE ISLAND AS A BASE OR NOT. WE ARE ACTIVELY PURSUING, HOWEVER, IN PARTIAL RESPONSE TO YOUR QUESTION AND AN EARLIER ONE, WE ARE ACTIVELY PURSUING FURTHER

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INFORMATION ON THIS MATTER. AS I HAVE SAID, ITS PRESENCE IS IN ANY CASE OF CONCERN TO US.

NOW, THE PRESIDENT HAS STATED, AS HE REITERATED AS RECENTLY AS A LETTER WITHIN THE MONTH, THAT IT IS THE POLICY OF THE UNITED STATES TO OPPOSE ANY EFFORTS, DIRECT OR INDIRECT, BY THE SOVIET UNION TO ESTABLISH MILITARY BASES IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE. THAT REMAINS THE POLICY.

WHAT IS NOT AT THIS POINT CLEAR IS A WAY TO CHARACTERIZE THE PRESENCE OF THIS COMBAT UNIT.

Q. IN TERMS OF JUST THE NUMBERS, HAS THERE BEEN A CHANGE IN THE ESTIMATE OF NUMBERS OR IS IT A CHANGE IN THE ESTIMATE OR THE EVALUATION OF THE CONFIGURATION OF THE

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NUMBERS THAT WERE ALREADY THERE?

A. THERE HAS TO BE SOME ELEMENTS OF BOTH. BUT THE NOTION OF THE STRUCTURE AT LEAST HAD TAKEN SOME SHAPE BEFORE NOW. THE NUMBERS IS WHAT BEGINS TO BE MORE THE QUESTION.

Q. SO, THERE WAS AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBERS.

A. WELL, IN THAT CASE --

Q. -- TRAINING TO AMPHIBIOUS LANDINGS OR WHAT?

A. WELL, I THINK YOU CAN PRETTY WELL FIGURE ON THIS WHAT WOULD BE A THREAT.

Q. I DIDN'T MAKE THE STATEMENT.

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A. I KNOW.

BUT I MEAN A MILITARY THREAT, I THINK, SPEAKS FOR ITSELF, WHICH IT IS NOT. HOWEVER, IT IS ALSO A MATTER, AS I HAVE SAID, WHICH WE CERTAINLY ARE NOT TAKING LIGHTLY OR WE WOULD NOT BE RAISING IT HERE.

Q. WHEN YOU SAY AS CURRENT CONFIGURED AND SUPPORTED, THE UNIT POSES NO THREAT TO THE US, DOES THAT INCLUDE U.S. FACILITIES AT GUANTANAMO?

A. I WOULD SAY THAT WE DO NOT FEEL, AS THIS STATEMENT SAYS, THAT THIS UNIT POSES A THREAT, AND THAT INCLUDES AMERICAN FACILITIES THERE.

Q. DID SENATOR CHURCH RELEASE THE INFORMATION AFTER BEING AUTHORIZED TO DO SO BY THE ADMINISTRATION?

A. I AM NOT GOING TO GO INTO THE QUESTION OF AUTHORIZATION, BUT IT WAS CERTAINLY AFTER A BRIEFING.

Q. ON THE OAS AND THE NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE, ARE ANY OF THE HEMISPHERIC NEIGHBORS -- HAVE ANY OF THEM EXPRESSED ENOUGH CONCERN OR HAS THE UNITED STATES IN ITS CONTACT WITH THEM DISCOVERED -NOUGH CONCERN THAT

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THIS MIGHT BE RAISED BY ANY OF THE OAS MEMBERS WHO ARE MEMBERS OF THE NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE AT THAT MEETING?

A. LOOK, LET ME JUST SAY THIS: THIS IS INFORMATION THAT WE HAVE RECENTLY -- A CONCLUSION TO WHICH WE HAVE RECENTLY COME. IT HAS BEEN OBVIOUSLY CLOSELY HELD, GIVEN THE NATURE OF THE INFORMATION; AND I SERIOUSLY DOUBT THAT WE HAVE RAISED IT JUST UP TILL NOW WITH ANYBODY ELSE OTHER THAN THOSE WHO HAVE THE FORCES THERE.

Q. ON THAT SAME POINT, DO ANY OF THE ASSESSMENTS TO WHICH
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YOU ARE PRIVY CONNECT THE PRESENCE OR THE STATIONING OF THESE TROOPS THERE AT THIS TIME WITH THE NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE?

A. I REALLY WOULDN'T HAVE ANY SPECULATION TO OFFER YOU ON WHY, WHERE, TIMING, ANY OF THAT.

Q. DID YOU SAY THAT AT THIS TIME IT DOESN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO, AS FAR AS TIMING -- THIS STATEMENT -- WITH NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES?

A. OH, ABSOLUTELY.

Q. HOWEVER, YOU SAY THAT IT HAS BECOME NECESSARY FOR YOU TO MAKE THE STATEMENT. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THAT?

A. YES. INFORMATION WAS COMING OUT IN BITS AND PIECES AND IT SEEMED NECESSARY TO TRY TO PUT OUT AS FULLY AS WE COULD WHAT IT IS WE BELIEVED AND WHAT IT WAS WE WERE TRYING TO DO ABOUT IT. IT'S AN OBLIGATION IN THIS CASE THAT WE THOUGHT WE OWED THE PEOPLE, TO OURSELVES, AND TO THE CONGRESS. END OF TEXT.

3. ALL POSTS EXCEPT HAVANA MAY DRAW ON SPOKESMAN'S INITIAL STATEMENT AT THEIR DISCRETION IN BRIEFING HOST GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ON THIS MATTER. (USINT HAVANA HAS SEPARATE INSTRUCTIONS.) VANCE

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